THE LADYBUG

"Ladybirds" we call them in England. When I was a child, I was taught, like you, to say the rhyme, "Ladybird, Ladybird, fly away home./Your house is on fire and your children are gone," whenever I saw a ladybug and then to blow on her a puff of air to launch her on her journey. "She must be very sad with all her children gone," I said to my mother when I was five and a ladybug landed on my sleeve. "Well, she is," replied my mother, "but she'll be alright because she's moving on." "Where to?" I asked. "To a new life," said mother, "and besides she's brought you good luck. The greater the number of spots on her back, the more luck she brings." This one had twelve spots. I decided the ladybird was red because of the fire and the spots were cinders on her back. The deeper she had gone into the fire to look for her children, the braver she had been and the greater the number of cinders (and spots) on her back. It takes courage and luck to start a new life, make art. After I left England, my mother bloomed. She made real friends for the first time since before her marriage and she has painted many tender watercolors and oils of landscapes and still lifes in delicate pastel shades so fresh and so subtle people buy and savor them. Now she also teaches what she knows. She brings everyone good luck. At eighty she still drives herself to work every day and acts as a personal assistant to her old boss. She and I are often in touch.

We were lucky; we never lost each other. We both make art.

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